tracking transportation trends in alameda county

MOBILITY MONITOR 2004

CENSUS 2000

GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

Transportation data from the 2000 Census are finally in! According to consultant David Jones, the numbers contain both good and bad news for transportation in Alameda County and the Bay Area.

The good news is that the share of commuters riding mass transit increased in the Bay Area from 1990 to 2000.

The bad news is that it takes longer to get to work: five minutes more in Alameda County and four minutes longer in the nine-county region.

Transit Gained on the Automobile

After decades of losing ground to the automobile, the 2000 Census showed transit making modest gains in commute share. Region-wide, the share of commuters using transit increased two percent from 1990 to 2000. While this is not a large gain, it moved the Bay Area from sixth to third place among large metropolitan areas nationwide—overtaking Washington, D.C., Boston and Philadelphia.

Alameda County enjoyed a larger gain than the region as a whole, increasing its transit commute share by six percent.

Within Alameda County, gains in transit's commute share were especially large in Pleasanton, Dublin and Livermore, where the percentage change was in triple digits for each community. This can be attributed, in part, to the opening of BART's Dublin service and the continuing success of ACE Commuter rail service. The cities of North County also reported significant gains. On the other hand, the Census found declining transit use rates among commuters in Oakland, Hayward and Union City.

In the Bay Area, MTC's *Regional Transportation Plan* commits over 75 percent of available funding to transit.

Nationwide, transit's gains in commute share were concentrated in the metropolitan areas of the West—the Bay Area, Los Angeles, San Diego, Sacramento, Seattle and Portland. But these gains were not sufficient to offset continuing losses in the East and Midwest. Nationwide, transit's commuter share declined almost 11 percent.

The concentration of transit gains in the West seems to reflect state and local policies favorable to transit improvement, including state operating subsidies and countywide sales tax

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As the local agency responsible for congestion management in Alameda County, the Congestion Management Agency (CMA) strategically plans, funds and implements projects and programs for highway and transit expansion, local road improvements, transit maintenance and improvements to bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

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programs like the one in Alameda County. Capital investment priority has also shifted to transit. Transit gains in the West also reflect the increasing time and stress associated with commuting on freeways that are the most congested in the nation.

Alameda County Residents Commuting by Transit: 1990-2000

Jurisdiction	%Transit Share 1990	% Transit Share 2000	% Change 1990–2000
Alameda	12.1	15.7	29.8
Albany	16.5	19.4	11.8
Berkeley	15.2	18.6	22.4
Dublin	2.0	5.4	170.0
Emeryville	12.9	19.0	47.3
Fremont	4.5	5.0	11.1
Hayward	7.8	6.8	–12.8
Livermore	1.5	3.3	120.0
Newark	3.4	3.4	—
Oakland	17.9	17.4	–2.8
Pleasanton	1.6	4.9	206.3
San Leandro	9.2	10.2	10.9
Union City	6.7	6.3	–6.0
Countywide	**10.0**	**10.6**	**6.0**

Source: MTC and the U.S. Census

Transit Ridership Since 2000

Transit ridership in Alameda County has declined in tandem with employment since the high-tech boom faded in 2001.

- AC Transit's ridership declined 2.4 percent from 2001 to 2002, after increasing 11.5 percent from 1995 to 2001.
- BART ridership declined 6.5 percent, after increasing nearly 35 percent from 1995 through 2001.
- The ACE commuter train declined 12.4 percent, after increasing a notable 82.5 percent from 1999 to 2001.
- LAVTA ridership declined two percent after increasing an astounding 124 percent from 1995 to 2001.

The downtrend experienced by each operator mirrors the intensity of the economic adjustment that occurred in its home market. It also reflects fare and service adjustments the operators had to make in order to balance their budgets.

More Time in Traffic

In 1990, the average Bay Area commuter could get to work in about 25 minutes. But by 2000, the average had risen to more than 29 minutes—an increase of almost 15 percent. Obviously something changed, in Alameda County in particular, and in the region as a whole.

What Happened Between 1990 and 2000?

The decisive factor seems to have been the commuting equivalent of the Perfect Storm, created by the combined impact of the New Economy employment boom, increasing congestion, skyrocketing housing prices and low mortgage interest rates.

Low interest rates created a buying opportunity for would-be home owners, while sky-high housing prices forced many first-time buyers to focus their housing search in outlying areas where homes are generally more affordable. For many, the result was a longer commute and increased travel time.

Some of the new, multi-county commutes — indicating the distance that many first-time homebuyers have to drive in order to secure home ownership at an affordable price— include:

- From the Livermore Valley to the West Bay;
- From Clayton and Brentwood to Oakland and San Francisco;

→ From Fairfield and Vacaville to Pleasanton and San Ramon; and

→ From Tracy and Modesto to the East Bay and the Silicon Valley.

Much of the resulting increase in freeway congestion occurred at metropolitan gateways—the Altamont Pass, the Sunol Grade, the Caldecott Tunnel, the three transbay bridges, the Albany Narrows and Dixon Landing. Congestion at such gateways accounted for more than half of the increase in Alameda County.

Congestion Since 2001

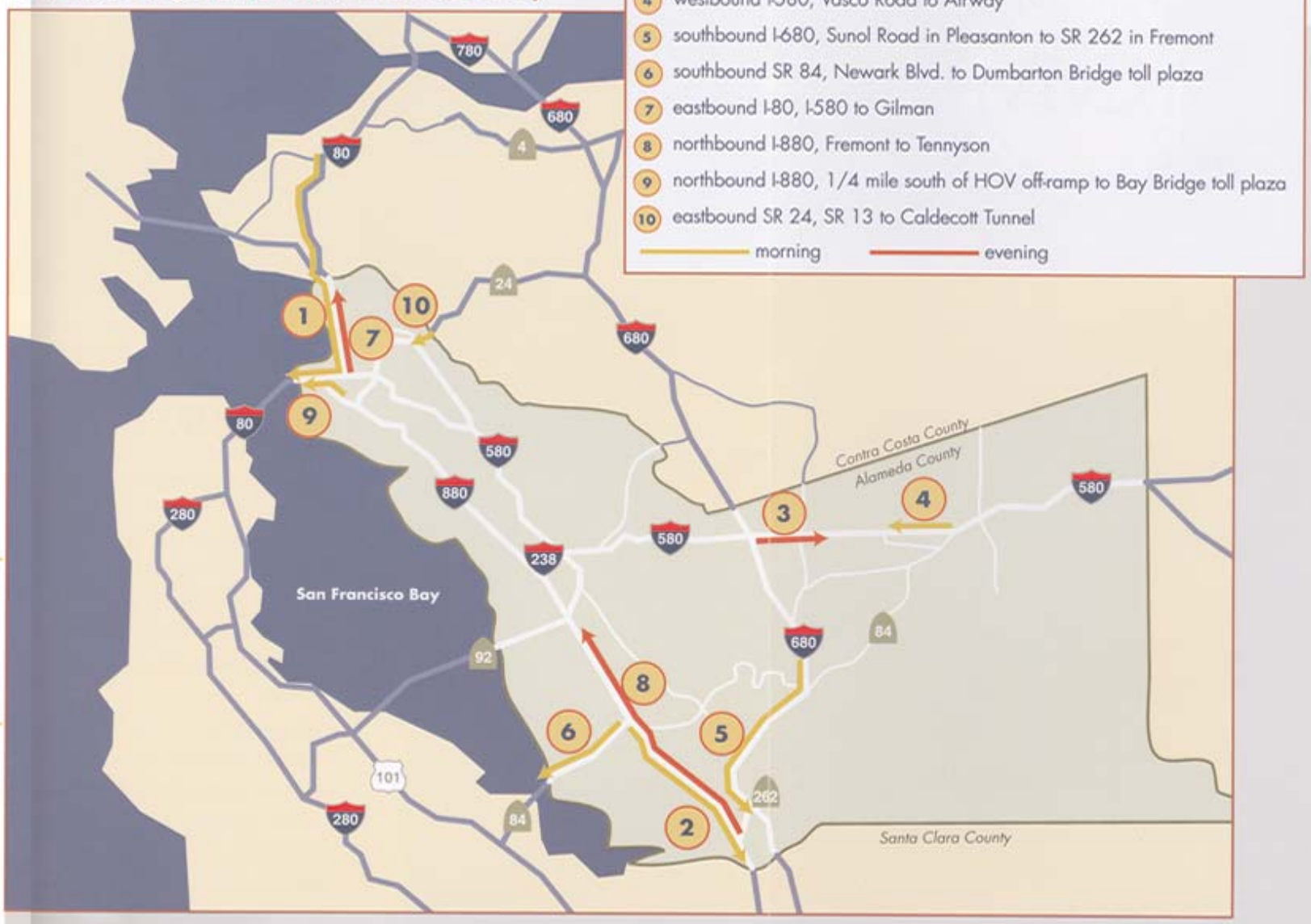
Both employment and congestion increased in Alameda County through the year 2001, despite significant job losses in San Francisco and the Silicon Valley.

Altogether, delay on Alameda County freeways increased 130 percent from 1990 to 2000.

In 2002, the recession spread to Alameda County, producing the first year-to-year decline in congested delay since the CMA began tracking freeway congestion trends.

Looking at 2003 top 10 congested corridors shows that once the tech bubble burst, increased congestion was most likely to be experienced in corridors where housing starts and housing sales remained vigorous despite the recession. These corridors were particularly notable along I-580 in the Livermore Valley and along State Route 4 in Contra Costa County. Increasing congestion in these corridors confirms the continuing pull that affordable housing has exerted over location choices and commuting patterns.

The 10 Most Congested Corridors in Alameda County



WHY ARE OUR FREEWAYS SO CONGESTED?

→ An engineer might emphasize the increasing mismatch between traffic volumes and highway capacity.

→ A planner might focus on sprawling settlement patterns that make transit hard to use.

→ A geographer might say it's our topography that focuses traffic in a few main corridors.

→ An economist might say we have every incentive to drive because freeways are free.

→ An environmentalist would get right down to earth and say, "It's because parking is free."

→ A doctor might say, "The cure could be worse than the disease."

The CMA's governing board is composed of elected officials representing all of the governments and major transit agencies in Alameda County.

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You are reading the fifth edition of *Mobility Monitor*, published by the Alameda County CMA. The CMA is the local agency responsible for planning countywide improvements in highways, streets and mass transit. The CMA, in cooperation with other local and regional agencies, determines which projects deserve investment priority.

AN ON-GOING SUCCESS STORY—THE I-680 HOV LANE

In 2001, Interstate-680 between State Routes 84 and 237—commonly known as the Sunol Grade—was Alameda County's third-worst bottleneck. A year later, congestion and delay had been reduced by nearly 60 percent and the corridor has dropped to the fifth most congested location in the county.

Give credit to an added HOV lane that allows carpools and vanpools to bypass southbound congestion, reducing delay by almost 5,000 vehicle hours and cutting travel time by roughly 20 minutes. Without the project, morning congestion would extend from 5:45 a.m. to almost 11:00 a.m.

The I-680 HOV lane is a success story that proves what can be accomplished when local and regional transportation authorities work together to create a project that satisfies both local and regional needs.

Phase II of the project will entail construction of a northbound HOV lane to reduce congestion during the afternoon peak.

Recent studies have shown that combining a HOV lane with a high occupancy toll (HOT) lane provides even more benefits than a carpool-only lane and is physically, operationally and financially feasible. Motorists pay a fee to use a faster moving HOT lane. Carpool drivers share the combined lane, but they travel for free.

Value pricing offers motorists the choice of paying a fee to save time and avoid congestion.

Electronic fee collection would maximize the number of commuters who can use the HOV lane without impairing its ability to operate smoothly and efficiently for carpools. The fee would be moderate when the HOV lane is lightly used; it would increase as crowding begins to slow the speed at which carpools can travel. Experts call this innovative approach "value pricing."

Further analysis will be needed before any final decision can be reached, but CMA planners believe the Sunol Grade offers a promising location for a first Bay Area HOT lane demonstration project.